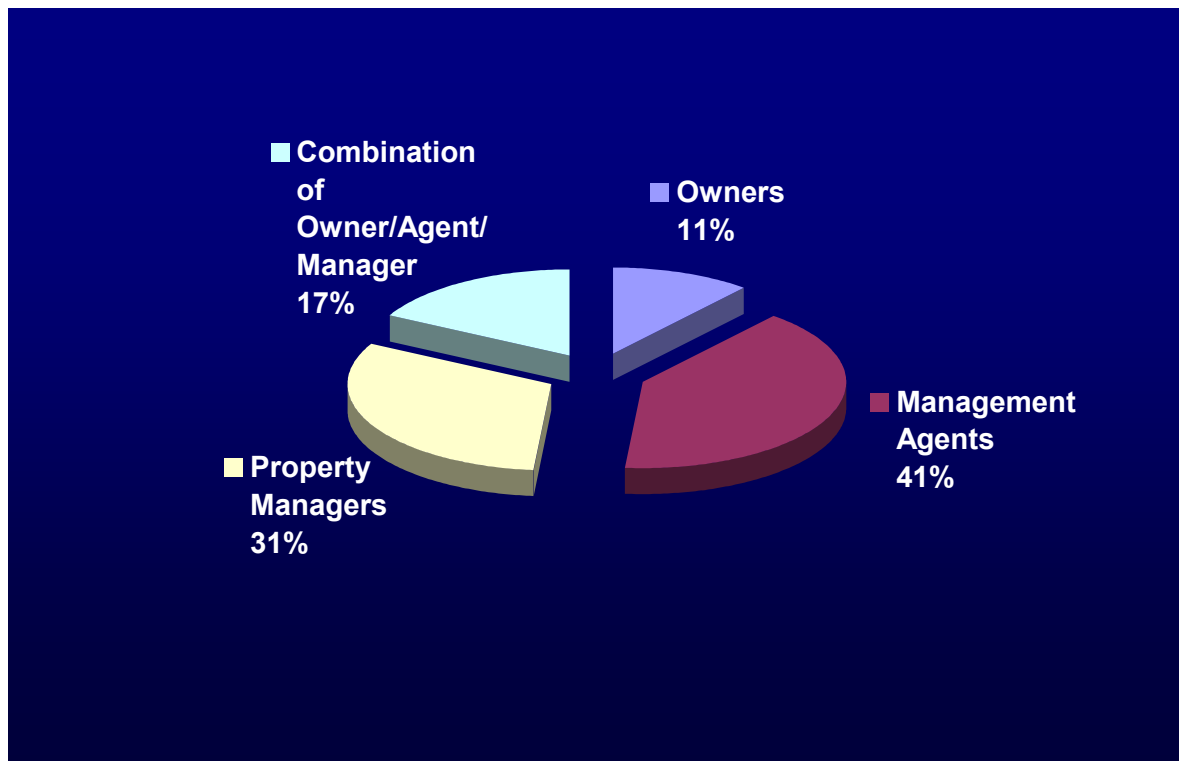


## **Iowa Finance Authority-Section 8 Contract Administration 2002 Customer Service Survey Results**

The survey was mailed to owner/agents on August 1, 2002. The return date was August 15, 2002. Approximately 10% of surveys were returned. This number decreased significantly from the previous year's survey from which we received 27% of surveys from owners and management agents.

Of the 35 surveys received, 11% of those who responded were owners, 40% were management agents, 31% were property managers, with the remaining 17% claiming status as a combination of owner/agent/property manager. See Types of Respondents 1.

**Types of Respondents 1**



51% of returned surveys contained the owner/management agent/property manager's name. These individuals will receive an acknowledgement and note appreciation for returning the survey.

## Management and Occupancy Review

100% of respondents stated that IFA staff was courteous and professional when conducting management and occupancy reviews.

89% thought that IFA staff was informed of current HUD regulations and were able to answer questions appropriately. 6% said no, 3% stated the question was not applicable, and 3% left the question blank.

63% of owners and agents rated the management review process as excellent or above average to ensure compliance with HUD regulations. 31% rated the process as average. 6% rated the process below average. 0% ranked the process as poor.

Comments or suggestions to improve the quality and delivery of Management and Occupancy reviews included the following:

*"In both the last year and this year's review process failed to answer thoroughly the questions presented during the review. After responding to the citations in the report, received a canned closure letter stating that all issues were resolved even though questions remain."*

*"I have been very pleased with the professional manner in which reviews are handled. It has been fun to watch the knowledge the IFA staff has gained in one year's time."*

*"It seems like a lot of work for us so often-but I guess that is beyond your control."*

*"Too much time is wasted on reviewing and requesting corrections on old paperwork that has been in files for years (i.e. applications)."*

*"This is in response to the customer service and satisfaction survey and I would like to give you my input regarding IFA and their services. I have personally been involved with IFA since their inception and I feel that over the past few years IFA has made some progress in their strides to perform their duties as contract administrator. There have been improvements made to all facets of the company and have seemed to have come to terms with most everything and are working well. The one area I feel still definitely needs work on is the MOR's. I feel as with most management companies do that you are getting back to the first year as far as inconsistency. It seems like every time a reviewer comes out, there is always something new. Even before the owners are made aware of any changes themselves; you are trying to implement on your knowledge and not the knowledge of the public you work with. Interpretation from the Handbook is a grey area. Who is right? you? the owners/management company? or HUD? There have been many changes since a*

*few years ago and in one sense is the time spent on a review. It is much more time consuming to do a MOR than in the past with either IFA's requirements or your accounting firm. It literally takes hours to make the copies you request. It would take even longer if the reviewer had to do it as they are not familiar with the files. Accountability is one thing but to account for everything we do in writing to more or less defend ourselves takes additional time that takes away from what the program was intended for and that is to be able to service the people who need subsidized housing. I feel we do a good job and we maintain a very qualified personnel department with many years of experience in the field as well as knowledge of the handbook. In some cases I feel that IFA has become a REAC inspection in the sense that there is not a button on the computer for "common sense" or consideration the situation. On the reviews, I feel that the reviewers have to dig so deep just to try and find an error such as an asset income of .62 being missed and documented as a finding. First of all, it does not make any difference in the individuals rent. Incomplete applications? Where in the handbook does it say that every item on the applications be completed? This should not be a finding. There usually is a reason why a resident leaves some areas blank and we are not in a position to alter a signed document from a prospective resident in which some applications are received through the mail. IFA and EPS also need to get together prior to instructing a company to correct something when no one knows what is going on. What are we to do when EPS nor IFA know how we are to handle a situation but are instructed to do so? It seems when there are personnel changes the requirements change as well. What was practiced in the past seems obsolete. I would like to know what represents a superior rating as opposed to a satisfactory rating. The company feels that if there are no findings, etc. that is superior. If we do not know your definition of superior, how can we establish that rating? Please advise as to your reason. In closing I feel that you need to listen to the management companies who have been in this business for years and continue to stay in the programs. There are companies that are to the point that it is not worth the hassle of what they have to go through with IFA and EPS and are pulling out of the programs and do not feel as that was what HUD had intended. I really got to rattling on this issue and apologize for the long response."*

## **Rental Adjustments**

71% of respondents stated that the IFA staff was courteous and professional when submitting rental adjustment requests. No one felt that staff was unprofessional. 20% of respondents marked not applicable on this question with 9% leaving the question unanswered.

63% of owners/agents/property managers believe the IFA staff is informed of current HUD regulation and are able to provide appropriate answers to questions regarding rental adjustments. 6% did not feel IFA staff was informed of current HUD regulations, nor provide appropriate answers. 23% of

responding individuals marked the question not applicable, with 9% leaving the question blank.

54% of those responding stated the IFA staff provided them with technical assistance. 14% said no, 26% marked not applicable and 6% left the question blank.

Overall on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being excellent, 3 average and 1 poor, 17% of respondents ranked the current process as excellent, 29% rated the process a 4, 23% deemed the process average, with 6% marking the process as below average or poor.

Comments received included:

*"We are confused by a recent denial response to the PBE submission supporting an increase. According to your office, the PBE is not intended to fully compensate the resident. We submitted average consumptions in support of the average PBE rates. (2 comments received)."*

*"When asking for assistance was directed to the manual. After fumbling through process, the rent increase was submitted. Was told it was rejected due to the project having too much reserve monies. 1. If I would have known that fact, I would not have wasted by time. 2. I hate the idea one has to spend down reserves so low before a rent increase will be accepted. I always like to be prepared for emergencies."*

*"IFA needs to get comments to owners timely."*

### **Contract Renewals**

57% of responses received felt the IFA staff conducting the contract renewal process was courteous and professional. 0% believed the staff was unprofessional, 31% marked the question not applicable, and 11% left the question blank.

57% also believe the IFA contract renewal team was informed of HUD regulations and were able to answer questions appropriately. 0% said no, 31% marked the question not applicable, 11% left the question blank.

When asked about the renewal process on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being excellent, 3 being average and 1 being poor, 31% rated the process as being a 5, 14% a 4, 11% a 3, with 0% rating the process a 2 or a 1. 43% of respondents left the question blank.

There were no comments or suggestions regarding the contract renewal process.

## Voucher Payments/Special Claims

91% of respondents believe the IFA budget staff is courteous and professional. 0% answered no to this question. 6% marked not applicable and 3% left the question blank.

86% of those responding stated the IFA budget staff is informed of current HUD regulations and able to answer questions appropriately. 0% answered no this question. 9% marked not applicable and 6% left the question blank.

The overall ranking system of 1 to 5 with 5 as excellent, 3 as average and 1 as poor, proved that 34% of respondents ranked the voucher payment process as excellent, 37% thought the process was above average, and 14% ranked the process as average. 0% believed the process was below average, and 3% thought the process was poor. 11% of respondents left the question unanswered.

Several comments were received regarding the voucher payment and special claim process: They include:

*"We have not completed special claims at this point, however all appears to be going well."*

*Special claims have much faster turn around than the Des Moines HUD office."*

*"As good as we can probably expect."*

*"It has been a learning process, but it is getting much better. It is nice to have our payment in a timely fashion."*

*"Reduce the paperwork process and contacts each month for HAP approval."*

*"If things aren't broke, don't fix them."*

## EPS, Inc.

When asked if EPS, Inc., responded to calls within a reasonable time, 83% of respondents believed that EPS is responsive to phone calls. 6% answered no. 6% marked not applicable. 6% left this question blank.

86% of respondents believe the EPS staff is courteous and professional. 3% did not believe the EPS staff was courteous and professional. 6% marked the answer not applicable, and 6% left the question unanswered.

71% of respondents believe EPS is informed of current HUD regulations and were able to answer questions appropriately. 6% did not believe EPS was

informed of current HUD regulations or able to answer questions. 17% marked this question not applicable, 6% left this question blank.

Using the above named rating scale of 1 to 5, 31% of respondents ranked the voucher reconciliation/tracs process as excellent, 31% believe the process was above average, 17% felt the process is average. 3% rank the process as below average, and 6% rank the process as poor. 11% of respondents left this question unanswered.

Comments or suggestions to improve the TRACS/voucher reconciliation process included:

*"Software providers refer some questions back to EPS, Inc."*

*"Had zero problem submitting directly to HUD. Even though I try and submit to EPS on or right after the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month, I have received confirmation faxes from EPS stating the results of my submissions and a request I submitted earlier. It is my understanding one doesn't run the monthly HAP until on or after the 1<sup>st</sup>. Have put a call into EPS asking why they want the info before the 1<sup>st</sup> and have received 1 phone call several (3 days or more) later. I was not in and have not stopped to call back yet."*

*"During the transition to the new tracsmail system, some of the EPS staff did not appear to be very well informed as to what the new procedures were going to be."*

*"They have been extremely helpful and patient with my limited computer knowledge."*

*"EPS is good, IPM software is slow."*

*"The other way of transmitting was simpler through Sprintmail."*

*"There have been mix-ups with EPS, but usually get straightened out OK."*

*"EPS should not make adjustments to the property HAP without first contacting the property."*

## **Communication**

86% of those responding state they have received a response to phone calls or correspondence within 2 business days. 9% do not feel they receive a response within a reasonable time frame. 6% marked not applicable for this question.

The overall rating of response time proved that 43% thought response time was excellent (5). 26% ranked response time as above average (4). 14% believed

response time was average. 6% labeled response time as below average, and 3% rated response time as poor. 9% of respondents left this question blank.

Comments regarding communication included:

*"Respond within 24 hours even if it is just an e-mail stating the message/question was received and will get back as soon as possible."*

*"When a managing agent has a problem that is submitted to you and then referred to HUD for a decision, it would seem appropriate to us if you stayed involved with the problem until a solution is reached. It is difficult to get answers to questions, with everything being contracted out—HUD, IFA, EPS, TRACS, etc. including software vendors. We get the "run around" and no concrete answer."*

*One pet peeve I have is when I call with a question, I've been told to look it up in the manual. I don't care for that response as most likely I have explored that avenue and can't find what I am looking for-or the area is too "gray" to get a black and white answer."*

Several questions polled owners and management agents on the IFA website as well as the neighborhood network initiative.

51% of owners, management agents, and property managers have accessed the IFA website. 40% stated they found the forms and regulations available on the Section 8 bullet helpful. 6% of respondents did not find the forms and regulations helpful. 19% left this question unanswered.

6% (2 respondents) stated they have a neighborhood network. 83% did not have a neighborhood network, although several more stated they provided at least one computer for their residents. 11% left this question blank.

Comments regarding the IFA website included:

*"Need to check it out. Have used HUDCLIPS for my forms."*

*Unable to download forms. We have Wordperfect 8."*

Respondents were asked to share what services they provide if they have a neighborhood network or have computer access available to residents.

Comments and services provided include:

*"I have acquired several computers provided by USDA, internet service is in the current budget where applicable."*

*"Internet, e-mail"*

*"We have a computer available to our tenant to use for e-mail, internet access, and work processing, but do not provide job training."*

*"Internet access, e-mail, word processing"*

If the owner or agent provided a computer or neighborhood network, the survey asked how they funded such a system. Funding is provided within regular business operations. Apparently USDA allows this an expense in their budgets.

## **Training**

Respondents were given choices for possible training topics. 60% of those responding requested occupancy training. 20% would like to receive training on budget-based rent increases. 26% opted for training on contract renewals. 60% requested TRACS training. 26% preferred special claims training. 3% selected the "other" category.

Respondents were willing to travel to travel for training. Results regarding mileage are as follows:

50 miles - 4 responses	200 miles - 2 responses
60 miles - 2 responses	225 miles
100 miles - 3 responses	250 miles
150 miles - 4 responses	4-5 hours

34% of respondents had an ICN location near their property/office. 29% stated they did not have an ICN location available. 11% marked this question not applicable. 26% left the question unanswered.

The closest facility to each property with ICN capabilities are listed as follows:

Belmond	Calmar, NICC
Carroll	Des Moines
Dubuque	Fort Dodge
Hawkeye Tech or UNI	Iowa City
NCC	Waterloo

57% of those responding stated they would attend training at an ICN location. 9% said they would not be interested in training available through ICN. 34% of respondents left the question unanswered.

Two comments regarding training was received. *"Occupancy-just a quick review focusing on the last five years of changes. Budget-based-step-by-step training. Contract Renewal-step-by-step training on what needs to be done."*



*TRACS-During the last Management review I was informed that there are errors in my project database and was instructed to call EPS to deal when I have time. Have not had time yet. This may be a difficult issue that needs a training session or could be something simply that the call to EPS will fix, don't know yet."*

*"Provide regular training."*

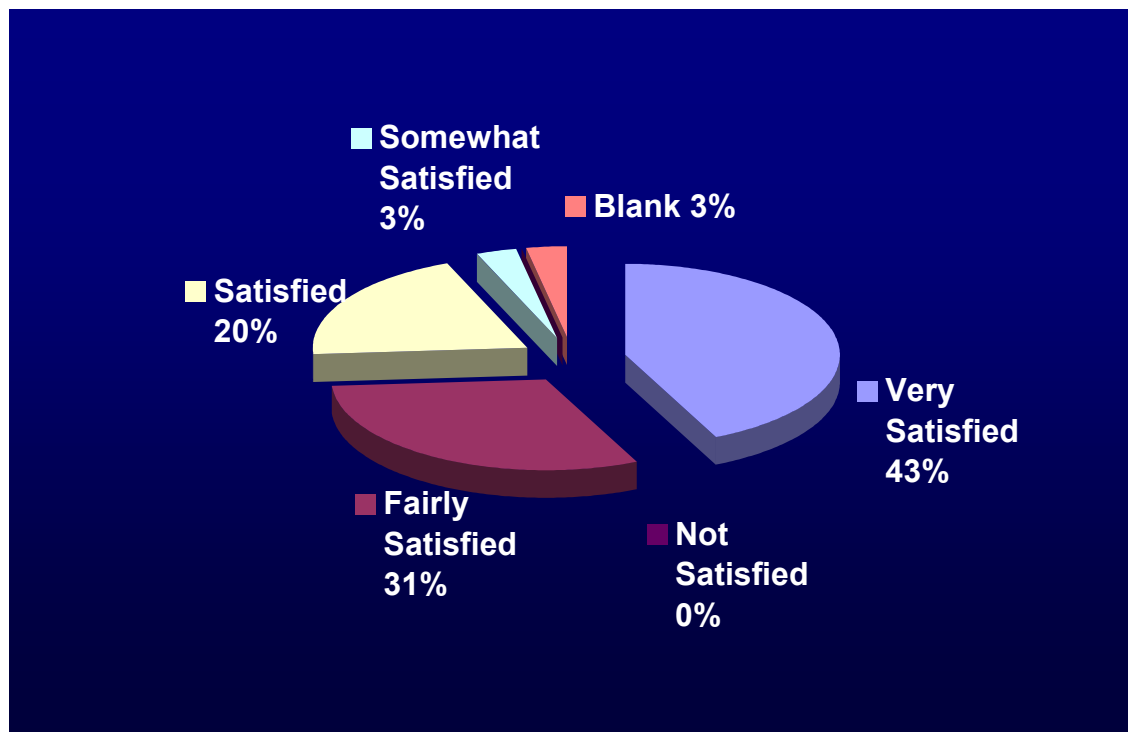
### Overall Satisfaction

When asked about overall satisfaction rate, 43% were very satisfied with IFA. 31% were fairly satisfied, 20% were satisfied. 3% were somewhat satisfied. 0% were not satisfied. 3% left the category blank.

Additional comments included:

*"Be more of a trainer than an inspector looking for errors to cite. Then, once citing an error respond with informative options that interpret the regulations instead of just citing the regulation, period. Or providing a response that is vague. This would suggest knowledge and a grasp of the regulations and a feeling of partnership between the housing industry and IFA rather than participating in an IRS audit." See Overall Results 1.*

### Overall Results 1



## Conclusion

The survey was distributed by e-mail to owners and management agents. It was also posted on the IFA website. This method saved postage costs, office supplies, staff time, and allowed for a more rapid response time. While the percentage of return was lower than the previous year, this technology is a valid method of communication. This was one of the first mass communication efforts made by the Section 8 department via e-mail. Providing regular communication through both of these methods will enhance property managers' ability and comfort level with this technology. It is my belief that the number of responses will increase in future year's surveys if we promote the use of e-mail and the website.

I have discussed the possibility of a "newsletter" sent via e-mail and posted on the website with Roger Brown. This will promote use of electronic mail and the IFA website (Section 8 bullet) regularly, encouraging the use of this technology. It will also provide additional and regular contacts with owners/management agents and property managers.

Results and comments regarding the core tasks will be reviewed by the appropriate supervisor and discussed with Roger Brown.

The comments regarding communication pertain to all divisions and contain valid comments which can be quickly implemented. Whenever possible, a response should be made by phone or e-mail within 24 hours even if it is an acknowledgement of receipt. I believe this is happening in most instances, however, regular reminders to staff may be needed.

Furthermore, while we can and should promote use of the handbook by asking the owner/management agent/property manager to look at the reference with us, and discuss the reference by phone, I do not feel our response should be "look it up in the manual" in any case.

Training is also one way we can further communication and assist owners/management agents with regulation compliance. 60% of respondents requested training in occupancy and TRACS. Training may be provided via the Iowa Communications Network or locally. We have expert knowledge available through EPS, Inc. and should use it to the fullest extent. Occupancy training may be more applicable after the implementation of the new HUD Handbook 4350.3. Upcoming changes in the Special Claims process and the TRACS compliance initiative may also provide training opportunities.

Overall, the staff is to be commended on their performance in the last year. They have worked hard to provide our customer base with excellent service, consistent interpretation of HUD regulation, and technical assistance where necessary.